

"CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN"

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

MR. and Mrs. Baxter, having walked a hot half-mile from church, drooped thankfully into wicker chairs upon their front porch, though their ten-year-old daughter, Jane, who had accompanied them, immediately darted away, swinging her hat by its ribbon and skipping as lithesomely as if she had just come forth upon a cool morning.

"I don't know how she does it!" her father moaned, glancing after her and drying his forehead temporarily upon a handkerchief. "That would merely kill me dead, after walking in this heat."

Then, for a time, the two were content to sit in silence, nodding to occasional acquaintances who passed in the desultory after-church procession. Mr. Baxter fanned himself with sporadic little bursts of energy which made his straw hat creak, and Mrs. Baxter sighed with the heat, and gently rocked her chair.

But, as a group of five young people passed along the other side of the street, Mr. Baxter abruptly stopped fanning himself, and, following the direction of his gaze, Mrs. Baxter ceased to rock. In half-completed attitudes they leaned slightly forward, sharing one of those pauses of parents who unexpectedly behold their offspring.

The offspring, in this case, was their son, William.

"My soul!" said William's father. "Hasn't that girl gone home *yet?*"

"He looks pale to me," Mrs. Baxter murmured absently. "I don't think he seems at all well, lately."

During the seventeen years since the arrival of William, their first born, Mr. Baxter had gradually learned not to protest anxieties of this kind, unless he desired to argue with no prospect of ever getting a decision.

"Hasn't she got any *home?*" he demanded testily.

"Isn't she ever going to quit visiting the Parchers and let people have a little peace?"

Mrs. Baxter disregarded this outburst as he had disregarded her remark about William's pallor. "You mean Miss Pratt?" she inquired dreamily, her eyes following the progress of her son. "No, he really doesn't look well at all."

"Is she going to visit the Parchers all summer?" Mr. Baxter insisted.

"She already has, almost," said Mrs. Baxter.

"Look at that boy!" the father grumbled. "Mooning along with those other moon-calves — can't even let her go to church alone! I wonder how many weeks of time, counting it out in hours, he's wasted that way this summer?"

"Oh, I don't know! You see, he never goes there in the evening now."

"What of that? He's there all day, isn't he? What do they find to talk about? That's the mystery to me! Day after day, hours after hours — My soul! What do they *say*?"

Mrs. Baxter laughed indulgently. "People are always wondering that about the other ages. Poor Willie! I think that a great deal of the time their conversation would be probably about as general as it is now. You see Willie and Joe Bullitt are walking one on each side of Miss Pratt, and Johnnie Watson has to walk behind with May Parcher. Joe and Johnnie are there about as much as Willie is, and of course it's often his turn to be nice to May Parcher. He hasn't many chances to be tête-à-tête with Miss Pratt."

"Well, she ought to go home. I want that boy to get back into his senses. He's awful!"

"I think she is going soon," said Mrs. Baxter. "The Parchers are to have a dance for her Friday night, and I understand there's a floor to be laid in the yard and great things. It's a farewell party."

"That's one mercy, anyhow!"

"And if you wonder what they say," she resumed, "why, probably they're all talking about the party. And when Willie is alone with her — well, what does anybody say?" Mrs. Baxter interrupted herself to laugh. "Jane, for instance — she's always fascinated by that darkey, Genesis, when he's at work here in the yard, and they have long, long talks; I've seen them from the window. What on earth do you suppose they talk about? That's where Jane is now. She knew I told Genesis I'd give him something if he'd come and freeze the ice-cream for us to-day, and when we got here she heard the freezer and hopped right around there. If you went out to the back porch you'd find them talking steadily — but what on earth about I couldn't guess to save my life!"

And yet nothing could have been simpler: as a matter of fact, Jane and Genesis were talking about society. That is to say, their discourse was not sociologic; rather it was of the frivolous and elegant. Watteau prevailed with them over John Stuart Mill — in a word, they spoke of the beau monde.

Genesis turned the handle of the freezer with his left hand, allowing his right the freedom of gesture which was an intermittent necessity when he talked. In the matter of dress, Genesis had always been among the most informal of his race, but to-day there was a change almost unnerving to the Caucasian eye. He wore a balloonish suit of purple, strangely scalloped at pocket and cuff, and more strangely decorated with lines of small parasite buttons, in color blue, obviously buttons of leisure. His bulbous new shoes flashed back yellow fire at the embarrassed sun, and his collar (for he had gone so far) sent forth other sparkles, playing upon a polished surface over an inner graining of soot. Beneath it hung a simple, white, soiled evening tie, draped in a manner unintended by its manufacturer, and heavily overburdened by a green glass medallion of the Emperor Tiberius, set in brass.

"Yes'm," said Genesis. "Now I'm in 'at Swim — flyin' roun' ev'y even' wif all lem blue-vein people — I say, 'Mus' go buy me some blue-vein clo'es! Ef I'm go'n a *start*, might's well start *high*!' So firs', I buy me thishere gol' necktie pin wi' thishere lady's face carved out o' green di'mon, sittin' in the middle all 'at gol'. 'Nen I buy me pair Royal King shoes. I got a frien' o' mine, thishere Blooie Bowers; he say Royal King shoes same kine o' shoes *he* wear, an' I walk straight in 'at sto' where they keep 'em at. 'Don' was'e my time showin' me no ole-time shoes,' I say. 'Run out some them big, yella, lump-toed Royal Kings befo' my eyes, an' firs' pair fit me I pay price, an' wear em' right off on me!' 'Nen I got me thishere suit o' clo'es — *oh*, *oh*! Sign on 'em in window: 'Ef you wish to be bes'-dress' man in town take me home fer six dolluhs ninety-sevum cents.' "'At's kine o' suit Genesis need,' I say. 'Ef Genesis go'n a start dressin' high, might's well start top!'"

Jane nodded gravely, comprehending the reasonableness of this view. "What made you decide to start, Genesis?" she asked earnestly. "I mean, how did it happen you began to get this way?"

"Well, suh, 't all come 'bout right like kine o' slidin' into it 'stid o' hoppin' an' jumpin'. I'z spen' the even' at 'at lady's house, Fanny, what cook nex' do', las' year. Well, suh, 'at lady Fanny, she quit privut cookin', she kaytliss ——"

"She's what?" Jane asked. "What's that mean, Genesis — kaytliss?"

"She kaytuhs," he exclaimed. "Ef it's a man you call him kaytuh; ef it's a lady she's a kaytliss. She does kaytun fer all lem blue-vein fam'lies in town. She make refreshmuns, bring waituhs — 'at's kaytun. You maw give big dinnuh, she have Fanny kaytuh, an' don't take no trouble 'tall herself. Fanny take all 'at trouble."

"I see," said Jane. "But I don't see how her bein' a kaytliss started you to dressin' so high, Genesis."

"Thishere way. Fanny say, 'Look here, Genesis, I got big job t'morra night an' I'm man short, 'count o' havin' to have a 'nouncer.'"

"A what?"

"Fanny talk jes' that way. Goin' be big dinnuh potty, an' thishere blue-vein fam'ly tell Fanny they want whole lot of extry sploogin'; tell her put fine lookin cullud man stan' by drawin'-room do' — ask ev'ybody name an' holler out whatever name they say, jes' as they walk in. This-here fam'ly say they goin' show what's what, 'nis town, an' they boun' Fanny go git 'em a 'nouncer. 'Well, what's mattuh *you* doin' 'at 'nouncin'?' Fanny say. 'Who — me?' I tell her. 'Yes, you kin too!' she say, an' she say len' me 'at waituh suit yoosta b'long ole Henry Gimlet what die' when he owin' Fanny sixteen dolluhs — an' Fanny tuck an' keep 'at waituh suit. She use 'at suit on extry waituhs when she got some on her hands what ain' got no waituh suit. 'You wear 'at suit,' Fanny say, 'an' you be good 'nouncer, 'cause you' a fine, big man, an' got a big gran' voice; nen you learn befo' long be a waituh, Genesis, 'an git dolluh an' half ev'y even' you waitin', 'sides all 'at money you make cuttin' grass day-time.' Well, suh, I'z stan' up doin' 'at 'nouncin' ve'y nex' night. White lady an' ge'lmun walk todes my do', I step up to 'em — I step up to 'em thisaway." Here Genesis found it pleasant to present the scene with some elaboration. He dropped the handle of the freezer, rose, assumed a stately but ingratiating expression and "stepped up" to the imagined couple, using a pacing and rhythmic gait — a conservative prance, which plainly indicated the simultaneous operation of an orchestra. Then bending graciously, as though the persons addressed were of dwarfish stature, "'Scuse me," he said, "but kin I please be so p'lite as to 'quiah you' name?" For a moment he listened attentively, then nodded, and, returning with the same aristocratic undulations to an imaginary doorway near the freezer, "Misto an' Missuz Orlosko Rinktum!" he proclaimed sonorously.

"*Who?*" cried Jane, fascinated. "Genesis, 'nounce that again, right away!"

Genesis heartily complied.

"Misto an' Missuz Orlosko Rinktum!" he bawled.

"Was that really their names?" she asked eagerly.

"Well, I kine o' fergit," Genesis admitted, resuming his work with the freezer. "Seem like I rickalect *somebody* got name good deal like what I say, 'cause some mighty blue-vein names at 'at dinnuh-potty, yes-suh! But I on'y git to be 'nouncer one time, 'cause Fanny tellin' me nex' fam'ly have dinnuh-potty make heap o' fun. Say I done my 'nouncin' good as kin be, but say what's use holler'n names jes' fer some the neighbors or they own aunts an' uncles to walk in, when ev'rybody awready knows 'em? So Fanny pummote me to waituh, an' I roun' right in amongs' big doin's mos' ev'y night. Pass ice-cream, lemonade, lemon-ice, cake, sammitches. 'Lemme han' you lil mo' chicken-salad, ma'am' — 'Low me be so kine as to git you f'esh cup coffee, suh' — 's way ole Genesis talkin' ev'y even' 'ese days!"

Jane looked at him thoughtfully. "Do you like it better than cuttin' grass, Genesis?" she asked.

He paused to consider.

"Yes'm — when ban' play all lem *tunes!* My goo'ness, do soun' gran'!"

"You can't do it to-night, though, Genesis," said Jane. "You haf to be quiet on Sunday nights, don't you?"

"Yes'm. Ain' got no mo' kaytun till nex' Friday even'."

"Oh, I bet that's the party for Miss Pratt at Mr. Parcher's!" cried Jane. "Didn't I guess right?"

"Yes'm. I reckon I'm a go'n a see one you' fam'ly 'at night; see him dancin' — wait on him at refreshmuns."

Jane's expression became even more serious than usual. "Willie? I don't know whether he's goin', Genesis."

"Lan' name!" Genesis exclaimed. "He die ef he don' git *invite* to 'at ball!"

"Oh, he's invited," said Jane. "Only I think maybe he won't go."

"My goo'ness! Why ain't he goin'?"

Jane looked at her friend studiously before replying. "Well, it's a secret," she said, finally, "but it's a very inter'sting one, an' I'll tell you if you never tell."

"Yes'm; I ain't tellin' nobody."

Jane glanced round, then stepped a little closer and told the secret with the solemnity it deserved. "Well, when Miss Pratt first came to visit Miss May Parcher, Willie used to keep papa's evening clo'es in his window-seat, an' mamma wondered what *had* become of 'em. Then, after dinner, he'd slip up there an' put 'em on him, an' go out through the kitchen an' call on Miss Pratt. Then mamma found 'em, and she thought he oughtn't to do that, so she didn't tell him or anything an' she didn't even tell papa, but she had the tailor make 'em ever an' ever so much bigger, 'cause they were gettin' too tight for papa. An', well, so after that, even if Willie could get 'em out o' mamma's clo'es closet where she keeps 'em now, he'd look so funny in 'em he couldn't wear 'em. Well, an' then he's never been to see Miss Pratt in the evening one single time since then because mamma says after he started to go there in that suit he couldn't go without it, or maybe Miss Pratt or the other ones that's in love of her would think it was pretty queer, and maybe kind of expeck it was papa's all the time. Mamma says she thinks Willie must have worried a good deal over reasons to say why he'd always go in the daytime after that, an' never came in the evening, an' now they're goin' to have this party, an' she says he's been gettin' paler an' paler every day since he heard about it. Mamma says he's pale *some*, because Miss Pratt's goin' away, but she thinks it's a good deal more because, well, if he would wear those evening clo'es just to go callin', how would it be to go to that party an' not have any? That's what mamma thinks — an', Genesis, you promised you'd never tell as long as you lived!"

"Yes'm. I ain' tellin'," Genesis chuckled. "I'm a go'n a git me one nem waituh suits befo' long, myse'f, so's I kin quit wearin' 'at ole Henry Gimlet suit what b'longs to Fanny, an' have me a privut suit o' my own. They's a secon' han' sto', ovuh on the avynoo, where they got swaller-tail suits all way f'um sevum dolluhs to nineteen dolluhs an' ninety-eight cents. I'm a ——"

Jane started, interrupting him. "*Sh*," she whispered, laying a finger warningly upon her lips. William had entered the yard at the back gate, and, approaching over the lawn, had arrived at the steps of the porch before Jane perceived him. She gave him an apprehensive look, but he passed into the house absent-mindedly, not even glancing at Clematis, the humble and faithful dog in attendance upon Genesis — and that was remarkable, because the sight of Clematis was nearly always but too obviously painful to William. Clematis was so mingled a dog that he shook one's faith in any definiteness of design on the part of Nature: it hurt William to see him about the premises, and William showed his feelings, for he feared that people might think Clematis belonged to him or to his family. But to-day he passed without flinching — and Mrs. Baxter was right: William did look pale.

"I guess he didn't hear us," said Jane, when he had disappeared into the interior. "He acks awful funny!" she added thoughtfully. "First when he was in love with Miss Pratt, he'd be mad about somep'm' almost every minute he was home. Couldn't anybody say *anything* to him but he'd just behave as if it was awful, an' then if you'd see him out walkin' with Miss Pratt, well, he'd look like — like ——" Jane paused; her eye fell upon Clematis and by a happy inspiration she was able to complete her simile with remarkable accuracy. "He'd look like the way Clematis looks at people! That's just *exackly* the way he'd look, Genesis, when he was walkin' with Miss Pratt; an' then when he was home he got so quiet he couldn't answer questions an' wouldn't hear what anybody said

to him at table or anywhere, an' papa'd just almost bust. Mamma 'n' papa'd talk an' talk about it, an'" — she lowered her voice — "an' I knew what they were talkin' about. Well, an' then he'd hardly ever get mad any more; he'd just sit in his room, an' sometimes he'd sit in there without any light, or he'd sit out in the yard all by himself all evening maybe, an' th' other evening after I was in bed I heard 'em, an' papa said — well, this is what papa told mamma." And again lowering her voice, she proffered the quotation from her father in a tone somewhat awe-struck. "Papa said, by Gosh! if he ever 'a' thought a son of his could make such a Word idiot of himself he almost wished we'd both been girls!"

Having completed this report in a violent whisper Jane nodded repeatedly, for emphasis, and Genesis shook his head to show that he was as deeply impressed as she wished him to be. "I guess," she added, after a pause, "I guess Willie didn't hear anything we talked about him, or clo'es, or anything."

She was mistaken in part. William had caught no reference to himself, but he had overheard something, and he was now alone in his room, thinking about it almost feverishly. "A secon' han' sto', ovuh on the avy-noo, where they got swaller-tail suits all way frum sevem dolluhs to nineteen dolluhs an' ninety-eight cents."

... Civilization is responsible for certain longings in the breast of man — artificial longings, but sometimes as poignant as hunger and thirst. Of these the strongest are those of the maid for the bridal veil, of the lad for long trousers, and of the youth for a tailed coat of state. To the gratification of this last, few of the more hushed joys in life are comparable. Indulged youths, too rich, can know, to the unctuous full, neither the longing nor the gratification; but one such as William, in "moderate circumstances," is privileged to pant for his first evening clothes as the hart panteth after the water-brook —

and sometimes, to pant in vain. Also, this was a crisis in William's life: in addition to his yearning for such apparel, he was racked by a passionate urgency.

As Jane had so precociously understood, unless he should somehow manage to obtain the proper draperies he could not go to the farewell dance for Miss Pratt. Other unequipped boys could go in their ordinary "best clothes," but William could not; for, alack! he had dressed too well too soon!

He was in desperate case. The sorrow of the approaching great departure was but the heavier because it had been so long deferred. To William it had seemed that this flower-strewn summer could actually end no more than he could actually die, but Time had begun its awful lecture, and even Seventeen was listening. Miss Pratt, that magic girl, was going home.

To the competent twenties, hundreds of miles suggesting no impossibilities, such departures may be rending but not tragic. Implacable, the difference to Seventeen! Miss Pratt was going home, and Seventeen could not follow; it could only mourn upon the lonely shore, tracing little angelic footprints left in the sand. To Seventeen such a departure is final; it is a vanishing.

And now it seemed possible that William might be deprived even of the last romantic consolations: of the "last waltz together," of the last, last "listening to music in the moonlight together"; of all those sacred lasts of the "last evening together." And this was a thought that turned him cold on the hot day: it was unbearable.

He had pleaded strongly for a "dress-suit" as a fitting recognition of his seventeenth birthday anniversary, but he had been denied by his father with a jocularly more crushing than rigor. Since then — in particular since the arrival of Miss Pratt — Mr. Baxter's temper had been growing steadily more and more even. That is, as affected by William's social activities, it was uniformly

bad. Nevertheless, after heavy brooding, William decided to make one final appeal before he resorted to measures which the necessities of despair had brought to his mind.

He wished to give himself every chance for a good effect; therefore he did not act hastily, but went over what he intended to say, rehearsing it with a few appropriate gestures, and even taking some pleasure in the pathetic dignity of this performance, as revealed by occasional glances at the mirror of his dressing-table. But in spite of these little alleviations, his trouble was great and all too real, for, unhappily, the previous rehearsal of an emotional scene does not prove the emotion insincere.

Descending, he found his father and mother still sitting upon the front porch. Then, standing before them, solemn-eyed, he uttered a preluding cough, and began:

"Father," he said, in a loud voice, "I have come to ——"

"Dear me!" Mrs. Baxter exclaimed, not perceiving that she was interrupting an intended oration. "Willie, you *do* look pale! Sit down, poor child; you oughtn't to walk so much in this heat."

"Father," William repeated. "Fath——"

"I suppose you got her safely home from church," Mr. Baxter said. "She might have been carried off by highwaymen if you three boys hadn't been along to take care of her!"

But William persisted heroically. "Father," he said. "Father, I have come to ——"

"What on earth's the matter with you?" Mr. Baxter ceased to fan himself, Mrs. Baxter stopped rocking, and both stared, for it had dawned upon them that something unusual was beginning to take place.

William backed to the start and tried it again. "Father, I have come to ——" He paused and gulped, evidently expecting to be interrupted, but both of his parents remained silent, regarding him with puzzled surprise. "Father," he began once more, "I have come — I have

come to -- to place before you something I think it's your duty as my father to undertake, and I have thought over this step before laying it before you."

"My soul!" said Mr. Baxter under his breath. "My soul!"

"At my age," William continued, swallowing, and fixing his earnest eyes upon the roof of the porch to avoid the disconcerting stare of his father, "at my age there's some things that ought to be done and some things that ought not to be done. If you asked me what I thought *ought* to be done, there is only one answer: When anybody as old as I am has to go out among other young men his own age that already got one, like anyway half of them *have*, who I go with, and their fathers have already taken such a step, because they felt it was the only right thing to do, because at my age and the young men I go with's age it *is* the only right thing to do because that is something nobody could deny, at my age ——" Here William drew a long breath, and, deciding to abandon that sentence as irrevocably tangled, began another: "I have thought over this step, because there comes a time to every young man when they must lay a step before their father before something happens that they would be sorry for. I have thought this undertaking over, and I am certain it would be your honest duty ——"

"My soul!" gasped Mr. Baxter. "I thought I knew you pretty well, but you talk like a stranger to me! What *is* all this? What *you want*?"

"A dress-suit!" said William. He had intended to say a great deal more before coming to the point, but though through nervousness he had lost some threads of his rehearsed plea, it seemed to him he was getting along well, and putting his case with some distinction and power. He was surprised and hurt, therefore, to hear his father utter a wordless shout in a tone of wondering derision.

"I have more to say ——" William began.

But, disregarding this, Mr. Baxter cut him off. "A

dress-suit!" he cried. "Well, I'm glad you were talking about *something*, because I honestly thought it must be too much sun!"

At this, the troubled William brought his eyes down from the porch roof and forgot his rehearsal. He lifted his hand appealingly. "Father," he said, "I *got* to have one!"

"Got to!" Mr. Baxter laughed a laugh that chilled the suppliant through and through. "At your age I thought I was lucky if I had *any* suit that was fit to be seen in. You're too young, Willie. I don't want you to get your mind on such stuff, and if I have my way, you won't have a dress-suit for four years more, anyhow."

"Father, I *got* to have one. I got to have one right away!" The urgency in William's voice was almost tearful. "I don't ask you to have it made, or to go to expensive tailors, but there's a plenty of good ready-made ones that only cost about forty dollars; they're advertised in the paper. Father, wouldn't you spend just forty dollars? I'll pay it back when I'm in business. I'll work ——"

Mr. Baxter waved all this aside. "It's not the money. It's the principle that I'm standing for, and I don't intend ——"

"Father, *won't* you do it?"

"No, I will not!"

William saw that sentence had been passed and all appeals for a new trial denied. He choked, and rushed into the house without more ado.

"Poor boy!" his mother said.

"Poor boy nothing!" fumed Mr. Baxter. "He's almost lost his mind over that Miss Pratt. Think of his coming out here and starting a regular debating society declamation before his mother and father! Why, I never heard anything like it in my life! I don't like to hurt his feelings, and I'd give him anything I could afford that would do him any good, but all he wants it for now is to splurge

around in at this party before that little yellow-haired girl! I guess he can wear the kind of clothes most of the other boys wear — the kind *I* wore at parties — and never thought of wearing anything else. What's the world getting to be like? Seventeen years old and throws a fit because he can't have a dress-suit!"

Mrs. Baxter looked thoughtful. "But — but suppose he felt he couldn't go to the dance unless he wore one, poor boy ——"

"All the better," said Mr. Baxter firmly. "Do him good to keep away and get his mind on something else."

"Of course," she suggested, with some timidity, "forty dollars isn't a great deal of money, and a ready-made suit, just to begin with ——"

Naturally Mr. Baxter perceived whither she was drifting. "Forty dollars isn't a thousand," he interrupted, "but what you want to throw it away for? One reason a boy of seventeen oughtn't to have evening clothes is the way he behaves with *any* clothes. Forty dollars! Why, only this summer he sat down on Jane's open paint-box, twice in one week!"

"Well — Miss Pratt *is* going away, and the dance will be her last night. I'm afraid it would really hurt him to miss it. I remember once, before we were engaged — that evening before papa took me abroad, and you ——"

"It's no use, mamma," he said. "We were both over twenty — why, *I* was six years older than Willie, even then. There's no comparison at all. I'll let him order a dress-suit on his twenty-first birthday and not a minute before. I don't believe in it, and I intend to see that he gets all this stuff out of his system. He's got to learn some hard sense!"

Mrs. Baxter shook her head doubtfully, but she said no more. Perhaps she regretted a little that she had caused Mr. Baxter's evening clothes to be ~~so~~ so expansively enlarged — for she looked rather regretful. She also looked rather incomprehensible, not to say cryptic, during the long

silence which followed, and Mr. Baxter resumed his rocking, unaware of the fixity of gaze which his wife maintained upon him — a thing the most loyal wives will do sometimes. The incomprehensible look disappeared before long, but the regretful one was renewed in the mother's eyes whenever she caught glimpses of her son, that day, and at the table, where William's manner was gentle — even toward his heartless father.

Underneath that gentleness, the harried self of William was no longer debating a desperate resolve, but had fixed upon it, and on the following afternoon Jane chanced to be a witness of some resultant actions. She came to her mother with an account of them.

"Mamma, what you s'pose Willie wants of those two ole market baskets that were down cellar?"

"Why, Jane?"

"Well, he carried 'em in his room, an' then he saw me lookin', an' he said 'G'way from here!' an' shut the door. He looks so funny! What's he want of those ole baskets, mamma?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he doesn't even know himself, Jane."

But William did know, definitely. He had set the baskets upon chairs, and now, with pale determination, he was proceeding to fill them. When his task was completed the two baskets contained, between them:

One heavy-weight winter suit of clothes.

One light-weight summer suit of clothes.

Two pairs of white flannel trousers.

Two Madras negligée shirts,

Two flannel shirts.

Two silk shirts.

Seven soft collars.

Three silk neckties.

One crocheted tie.

Eight pairs of socks.

One pair of patent-leather shoes.

One overcoat.

Some underwear.

One two-foot shelf of books, consisting of several sterling works upon mathematics, in a damaged condition; five of Shakespeare's plays, expurgated and edited for schools and colleges, and also damaged; a work upon political economy and another upon the science of physics; *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, *How to Enter a Drawing-Room and 500 Other Hints*, *Witty Sayings From Here and There*, *Lorna Doone*, *Quentin Durward*, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, a very old copy of *Moths*, and a small Bible.

William spread handkerchiefs upon the two overbulging cargoes, that their nature might not be disclosed to the curious, and, after listening a moment at his door, took the baskets, one upon each arm, then went quickly down the stairs and out of the house, out of the yard, and into the alley — by which route he had modestly chosen to travel.

... After an absence of about two hours, he returned empty-handed and anxious. "Mother, I want to speak to you," he said, addressing Mrs. Baxter in a voice which clearly proved the strain of these racking days. "I want to speak to you about something important."

"Yes, Willie?"

"Please send Jane away. I can't talk about important things with a child in the room."

Jane naturally wished to stay, since he was going to say something important. "Mamma, do I *haf* to go?"

"Just a few minutes, dear."

Jane walked submissively out of the door, leaving it open behind her. Then, having gone about six feet farther, she halted, and, preserving a breathless silence, consoled herself for her banishment by listening to what was said, hearing it all as satisfactorily as if she had remained in the room. Quiet, thoughtful children, like Jane, avail themselves of these little pleasures oftener than is suspected.

"Mother," said William, with great intensity, "I want to ask you please to lend me three dollars and sixty cents."

"What for, Willie?"

"Mother, I just ask you to lend me three dollars and sixty cents."

"But what *for*?"

"Mother, I don't feel I can discuss it any; I simply ask you: Will you lend me three dollars and sixty cents?"

Mrs. Baxter laughed gently. "I don't think I could, Willie, but certainly I should want to know what for."

"Mother, I am going on eighteen years of age, and when I ask for a small sum of money, like three dollars and sixty cents, I think I might be trusted to know how to use it for my own good without having to answer questions like a ch——"

"Why, Willie!" she exclaimed. "You ought to have plenty of money of your own."

"Of course I ought," he agreed warmly. "If you'd ask father to give me a regular allow——"

"No, no; I mean you ought to have plenty left out of that old junk and furniture I let you sell, last month. You had nearly nine dollars!"

"That was five weeks ago," William explained wearily.

"But you certainly must have some of it left. Why, it was *more* than nine dollars, I believe! I think it was nearer ten. Surely you haven't ——"

"Ye Gods!" cried the goaded William. "A person going on eighteen years old ought to be able to spend nine dollars in five weeks without everybody's acting like it was a crime! Mother, I ask you the simple question: Will you *please* lend me three dollars and sixty cents?"

"I don't think I ought to, dear. I'm sure your father wouldn't wish me to, unless you'll tell me what you want it for. In fact, I won't consider it at all unless you do tell me."

"You won't do it?" he quavered.

She shook her head gently. "You see, dear, I'm afraid the reason you don't tell me is because you know that I

wouldn't give it to you if I knew what you wanted it for."

And this perfect diagnosis of the case so disheartened him that after a few monosyllabic efforts to continue the conversation with dignity, he gave it up, and left in such a preoccupation with despondency that he passed the surprised Jane, in the hall, without suspecting what she had been doing.

That evening, after dinner, he made to his father an impassioned appeal for three dollars and sixty cents, laying such stress of pathos on his principal argument that if he couldn't have a dress-suit, at least he ought to be given three dollars and sixty *cents* (the emphasis is William's), that Mr. Baxter was moved in the direction of consent — but not far enough. "I'd like to let you have it, Willie," he said, excusing himself for refusal, "but your mother felt *she* oughtn't to do it, unless you'd say what you wanted it for, and I'm sure she wouldn't like me to do it. I can't let you have it unless you get her to say she wants me to."

Thus advised, the unfortunate made another appeal to his mother the next day, and having brought about no relaxation of the situation, again petitioned his father, on the following evening. So it went, the torn and driven William turning from parent to parent; and surely, since the world began, the special sum of three dollars and sixty cents has never been so often mentioned in any one house and in the same space of time as it was in the house of the Baxters during Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of that oppressive week. But on Friday William disappeared after breakfast and did not return to lunch.

Mrs. Baxter was troubled. During the afternoon she glanced often from the open window of the room where she had gone to sew, but the peaceful neighborhood continued to be peaceful, and no sound of the harassed footsteps of William echoed from the pavement. However, she saw Genesis arrive (in his week-day costume) to do

some weeding, and Jane immediately skip forth for mingled purposes of observation and conversation.

"What *do* they say?" thought Mrs. Baxter, observing that both Jane and Genesis were unusually animated. But for once that perplexity was to be dispersed. After an exciting half-hour Jane came flying to her mother, breathless.

"Mamma," she cried, "I know where Willie is! Genesis told me, 'cause he saw him, an' he talked to him while he was doin' it."

"Doing what? Where?"

"Mamma, listen! What you think Willie's doin'? I bet you can't g——"

"Jane!" Mrs. Baxter spoke sharply. "Tell me what Genesis said, at once."

"Yes'm. Willie's over in a lumber-yard that Genesis comes by on his way from over on the avynoo where all the colored people live — an' he's countin' knot-holes in shingles."

"He is *what*?"

"Yes'm. Genesis knows all about it, because he was thinkin' of doin' it himself, only he says it would be too slow. This is the way it is, mamma — listen, mamma, because this is just exactly the way it is. Well, this lumber-yard man got into some sort of a fuss because he bought millions an' millions of shingles, mamma, that had too many knots in an' the man don't want to pay for 'em, or else the store where he bought 'em won't take 'em back, an' they got to prove how many shingles are bad shingles, or somep'm, and anyway, mamma, that's what Willie's doin'. Every time he comes to a bad shingle, mamma, he puts it somewheres else, or somep'm like that, mamma, an' every time he's put a thousand bad shingles in this other place, they give him six cents. He gets the six cents to keep, mamma — an' that's what he's been doin' all day!"

"Good gracious!"

"Oh, but that's nothing, mamma — just you wait till you hear the rest. *That* part of it isn't anything a *tall*, mamma! You wouldn't hardly notice that part of it, if you knew the other part of it, mamma. Why, that isn't *anything!*" Jane made demonstrations of scorn for the insignificant information already imparted.

"Jane!"

"Yes'm?"

"I want to know everything Genesis told you," said her mother, "and I want you to tell it as quickly as you can."

"Well, I *am* tellin' it, mamma!" Jane protested. "I'm just *beginning* to tell it. I can't tell it unless there's a beginning, can I? How could there be *anything* unless you had to begin it, mamma?"

"Try your best to go on, Jane!"

"Yes'm. Well, Genesis says — Mamma!" Jane interrupted herself with a little outcry. "Oh! I bet *that's* what he had those two market baskets for! Yes, sir! That's just what he did! An' then he needed the rest o' the money and you an' papa wouldn't give him any, and so he began countin' shingles to-day 'cause to-night's the night of the party an' he just *hass* to have it!"

Mrs. Baxter, who had risen to her feet, recalled the episode of the baskets and sank into a chair. "How did Genesis know Willie wanted forty dollars, and if Willie's pawned something how did Genesis know *that*? Did Willie tell Gen——"

"Oh, no, mamma, Willie didn't want forty dollars — only fourteen!"

"But he couldn't get even the cheapest ready-made dress-suit for fourteen dollars."

"Mamma, you're gettin' it all mixed up!" Jane cried. "Listen, mamma! Genesis knows all about a second-hand store over on the avynoo; an' it keeps 'most everything, an' Genesis says it's the nicest store! It keeps waiter suits all the way up to nineteen dollars and ninety-nine cents. Well, an' Genesis wants to get one of those suits,

so he goes in there all the time an' talks to the man an' bargains an' bargains with him, 'cause Genesis says this man is the bargainest man in the wide worl', mamma! That's what Genesis says. Well, an' so this man's name is One-eye Beljus, mamma. That's his name, an' Genesis says so. Well, an' so this man that Genesis told me about that keeps the store — I mean One-eye Beljus, mamma — well, One-eye Beljus had Willie's name written down in a book, an' he knew Genesis worked for fam'lies that have boys like Willie in 'em, an' this morning One-eye Beljus showed Genesis Willie's name written down in his book, an' One-eye Beljus asked Genesis if he knew anybody by that name an' all about him. Well, an' so at first Genesis pretended he was tryin' to remember, because he wanted to find out what Willie went there for. Genesis didn't tell any stories, mamma; he just pretended he couldn't remember, an' so, well, One-eye Beljus kept talkin' an' pretty soon Genesis found out all about it. One-eye Beljus said Willie came in there and tried on the coat of one of those waiter suits ——”

“Oh, no!” gasped Mrs. Baxter.

“Yes'm, an' One-eye Beljus said it was the only one that would fit Willie, an' One-eye Beljus told Willie that suit was worth fourteen dollars, an' Willie said he didn't have any money, but he'd like to trade something else for it. Well, an' so One-eye Beljus said this was an awful fine suit an' the only one he had that had b'longed to a white gentleman. Well, an' so they bargained, an' bargained, an' bargained, an' *bargained!* An' then, well, an' so at last Willie said he'd go an' get everything that b'longed to him, an' One-eye Beljus could pick out enough to make fourteen dollars' worth, an' then Willie could have the suit. Well, an' so Willie came home an' put everything he had that b'longed to him into those two baskets, mamma — that's just what he did, 'cause Genesis says he told One-eye Beljus it was everything that b'longed to him, an' that would take two baskets, mamma. Well,

then, an' so he told One-eye Beljus to pick out fourteen dollars' worth, an' One-eye Beljus ast Willie if he didn't have a watch. Well, Willie took out his watch, an' One-eye Beljus said it was an awful bad watch but he would put it in for a dollar; an' he said, 'I'll put your necktie pin in for forty cents more,' so Willie took it out of his necktie; an' then One-eye Beljus said it would take all the things in the baskets to make I forget how much, mamma, and the watch would be a dollar more, an' the pin forty cents, an' that could leave just three dollars and sixty cents more for Willie to pay before he could get the suit."

Mrs. Baxter's face had become suffused with high color, but she wished to know all that Genesis had said, and, mastering her feelings with an effort, she told Jane to proceed — a command obeyed after Jane had taken several long breaths.

"Well, an' so the worst part of it is, Genesis says, it's because that suit is haunted."

"What!"

"Yes'm," said Jane solemnly; "Genesis says it's haunted. Genesis says everybody over on the avynoo knows all about that suit, an' he says that's why One-eye Beljus never could sell it before. Genesis says One-eye Beljus tried to sell it to a colored man for three dollars, but the man said he wouldn't put it on for three hundred dollars, an' Genesis says he wouldn't either, because it belonged to a Dago waiter that — that ——" Jane's voice sank to a whisper of unctuous horror: she was having a wonderful time! "Mamma, this Dago waiter, he lived over on the avynoo, an' he took a case-knife he'd sharpened — *an' he cut a lady's head off with it!*"

Mrs. Baxter screamed faintly.

"An' he got hung, mamma! If you don't believe it you can ask One-eye Beljus — I guess *he* knows! An' you can ask ——"

"Hush!"

"An' he sold this suit that Willie wants to One-eye Bel-

jus when he was in jail, mamma. He sold it to him before he got hung, mamma."

"Hush, Jane!"

But Jane couldn't hush now. "An' he had that suit on when he cut the lady's head off, mamma, an' that's why it's haunted. They cleaned it all up excep' a few little spots of bl——"

"*Jane!*" shouted her mother. "You must not talk about such things, and Genesis mustn't tell you stories of that sort!"

"Well, how could he help it, if he told me about Willie?" Jane urged reasonably.

"Never mind! Did that crazy ch—— Did Willie *leave* the baskets in that dreadful place?"

"Yes'm — an' his watch an' pin," Jane informed her impressively. "An' One-eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis knew Willie, because One-eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis thought Willie could get the three dollars an' sixty cents, an' One-eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis thought he could get anything more out of him besides that. He told Genesis he hadn't told Willie he *could* have the suit, after all; he just told him he *thought* he could, but he wouldn't say for certain till he brought him the three dollars and sixty cents. So Willie left all his things there, an' his watch an' ——"

"That will do!" Mrs. Baxter's voice was sharper than it had ever been in Jane's recollection. "I don't need to hear any more — and I don't *want* to hear any more!"

Jane was justly aggrieved. "But mamma, it isn't *my* fault!"

Mrs. Baxter's lips parted to speak, but she checked herself. "Fault?" she said gravely. "I wonder whose fault it really is!"

And with that she went hurriedly into William's room, and made a brief inspection of his clothes-closet and dressing-table. Then, as Jane watched her in awed silence, she strode to the window and called loudly:

"Genesis!"

"Yes'm?" came the voice from below.

"Go to that lumber-yard where Mr. William is at work and bring him here to me at once. If he declines to come, tell him ——" Her voice broke oddly; she choked, but Jane could not decide with what emotion. "Tell him — tell him I ordered you to use force if necessary! Hurry!"

"Yes'm!"

Jane ran to the window in time to see Genesis departing seriously through the back gate.

"Mamma ——"

"Don't talk to me now, Jane," Mrs. Baxter said crisply. "I want you to go down in the yard, and when Willie comes tell him I'm waiting for him here in his own room. And don't come with him, Jane. Run!"

"Yes, mamma." Jane was pleased with this appointment: she anxiously desired to be the first to see how Willie "looked."

... He looked flurried and flustered and breathless, and there were blisters upon the reddened palms of his hands. "What on earth's the matter, mother?" he asked, as he stood panting before her. "Genesis said something was wrong, and he said you told him to hit me if I wouldn't come."

"Oh, *no!*" she cried. "I only meant I thought perhaps you wouldn't obey any ordinary message ——"

"Well, well, it doesn't matter, but please hurry and say what you want to because I got to get back and ——"

"No," Mrs. Baxter said quietly. "You're not going back to count any more shingles, Willie. How much have you earned?"

He swallowed, but spoke bravely. "Thirty-six cents. But I've been getting lots faster the last two hours and there's a good deal of time before six o'clock. Mother ——"

"No," she said. "You're going over to that horrible place where you've left your clothes and your watch and all those other things in the two baskets, and you're going to bring them home at once."

"Mother!" he cried aghast. "Who told you?"

"It doesn't matter. You don't want your father to find out, do you? Then get those things back here as quickly as you can. They'll have to be fumigated after being in that den."

"They've never been out of the baskets," he protested hotly, "except just to be looked at. They're *my* things, mother, and I had a right to do what I needed to with 'em, didn't I?" His utterance became difficult. "You and father just *can't* understand — and you won't do anything to help me ——"

"Willie, you can go to the party," she said gently. "You didn't need those frightful clothes at all."

"I do!" he cried. "I *got* to have 'em! I *can't* go in my day clo'es! There's a reason you wouldn't understand why I can't. I just *can't*!"

"Yes," she said, "you can go to the party."

"I can't either! Not unless you give me three dollars and twenty-four cents, or unless I can get back to the lumber-yard and earn the rest before ——"

"No!" And the warm color that had rushed over Mrs. Baxter during Jane's sensational recital returned with a vengeance. Her eyes flashed. "If you'd rather I sent a policeman for those baskets, I'll send one. I should prefer to do it — much! And to have that rascal arrested. If you don't want me to send a policeman you can go for them yourself, but you must start within ten minutes, because if you don't I'll telephone headquarters. Ten minutes, Willie, and I mean it!"

He cried out, protesting. She would make him a thing of scorn forever and soil his honor, if she sent a policeman. Mr. Beljus was a fair and honest tradesman, he explained passionately, and had not made the approaches in this matter. Also, the garments in question, though not entirely new, nor of the highest mode, were of good material and in splendid condition. Unmistakably they were evening clothes, and such a bargain at fourteen dollars that

William would guarantee to sell them for twenty after he had worn them this one evening. Mr. Beljus himself had said that he would not even think of letting them go at fourteen to anybody else, and as for the two poor baskets of worn and useless articles offered in exchange, and a bent scarfpin and a worn-out old silver watch that had belonged to great-uncle Ben — why, the ten dollars and forty cents allowed upon them was beyond all ordinary liberality; it was almost charity. There was only one place in town where evening clothes were rented, and the suspicious persons in charge had insisted that William obtain from his father a guarantee to insure the return of the garments in perfect condition. So that was hopeless. And wasn't it better, also, to wear clothes which had only known one previous occupant (as was the case with Mr. Beljus' offering) than to hire what chance hundreds had hired? Finally, there was only one thing to be considered and this was the fact that William *had* to have those clothes!

"Six minutes," said Mrs. Baxter, glancing implacably at her watch. "When it's ten I'll telephone."

And the end of it was, of course, victory for the woman — victory both moral and physical. Three-quarters of an hour later she was unburdening the contents of the two baskets and putting the things back in place, illuminating these actions with an expression of strong distaste — in spite of broken assurances that Mr. Beljus had not more than touched any of the articles offered to him for valuation.

... At dinner, which was unusually early that evening, Mrs. Baxter did not often glance toward her son; she kept her eyes from that white face and spent most of her time in urging upon Mr. Baxter that he should be prompt in dressing for a card-club meeting which he and she were to attend that evening. These admonitions of hers were continued so pressingly that Mr. Baxter, after protesting that there was no use in being a whole hour too early, groaningly went to dress without even reading his paper

William had retired to his own room, where he lay upon his bed in the darkness. He heard the evening noises of the house faintly through the closed door: voices and the clatter of metal and china from the far-away kitchen, Jane's laugh in the hall, the opening and closing of the doors. Then his father seemed to be in distress about something: William heard him complaining to Mrs. Baxter; and though the words were indistinct, the tone was vigorously plaintive. Mrs. Baxter laughed and appeared to make light of his troubles, whatever they were — and presently their footsteps were audible from the stairway; the front door closed emphatically, and they were gone.

Everything was quiet now. The open window showed as a greenish oblong set in black, and William knew that in a little while — half an hour, perhaps — there would come through the stillness of that window the distant sound of violins. That was a moment he dreaded with a dread that ached. And as he lay on his dreary bed, he thought of brightly lighted rooms where other boys were dressing eagerly, faces and hair shining, hearts beating high — boys who would possess this last evening, and the "last waltz together," the last smile and the last sigh.

It did not once enter his mind that he could go to the dance in his "best suit," or that possibly the other young people at the party would be too busy with their own affairs to notice particularly what he wore. It was the unquestionable and granite fact, to his mind, that the whole derisive World would know the truth about his earlier appearances in his father's clothes. And that was a form of ruin not to be faced. In the protective darkness and seclusion of William's bedroom, it is possible that smarting eyes relieved themselves by blinking rather energetically; it is even possible that there was a minute damp spot upon the pillow. Seventeen cannot always manage the little boy yet alive under all the coverings.

There came a tapping upon the door and a soft voice.

"Will-ee?"

With a sharp exclamation William swung his legs over the edge of the bed and sat up. Of all things he desired not, he desired no conversation with, or on the part of, Jane. But he had forgotten to lock his door — the handle turned, and a dim little figure marched in.

"Willie, Adelia's goin' to put me to bed."

"You g'way from here," he said huskily. "I haven't got time to talk to you. I'm busy."

"Well, you can wait a minute, can't you?" she asked reasonably, "I haf to tell you a joke on mamma."

"I don't want to hear any jokes!"

"Well, I *haf* to tell you this one 'cause she told me to! Oh!" Jane clapped her hand over her mouth and jumped up and down, offering a fantastic silhouette against the light of the open door. "Oh, oh, *oh!*"

"What's matter?"

"She said I mustn't, *mustn't* tell that she told me to tell! My goodness! I forgot that! Mamma took me off alone right after dinner, an' she told me to tell you this joke on her as soon as she an' papa had left the house, but she said, 'Above all *things*,' she said, '*don't* let Willie know *I* said to tell him.' That's just what she said, an' here that's the very first thing I had to go an' do!"

"Well, what of it?"

Jane quieted down. The pangs of her remorse were lost in her love of sensationalism, and her voice sank to the thrilling whisper which it was one of her greatest pleasures to use. "Did you hear what a fuss papa was makin' when he was dressin' for the card-party?"

"I don't care if ——"

"He had to go in his reg'lar clo'es!" whispered Jane triumphantly. "An' this is the joke on mamma: you know that tailor that let papa's dress-suit way, way out; well, mamma thinks that tailor must think she's crazy, or somep'm, 'cause she took papa's dress-suit to him last Monday to get it pressed for this card-party, an' she guesses he must of understood her to tell him to do lots besides just

pressin' it. Anyway, he went an' altered it, an' he took it way, way in again; an' this afternoon when it came back it was even tighter'n what it was in the first place, an' papa couldn't *begin* to get into it! Well, an' so it's all pressed an' everything, an' she stopped on the way out, an' whispered to me that she'd got so upset over the joke on her that she couldn't remember where she put it when she took it out of papa's room after he gave up tryin' to get inside of it. An' that," cried Jane — "that's the funniest thing of all! Why, it's layin' right on her bed this very minute."

In one bound William leaped through the open door. Two seconds sufficed for his passage through the hall to his mother's bedroom — and there, neatly spread upon the lace coverlet and brighter than coronation robes, fairer than Joseph's sacred coat It lay!

NEWTON BOOTH TARKINGTON

How many in the class have read *Penrod* or *Seventeen*? A forest of waving hands is the answer. Pupils know what they like, and find in the work of Mr. Tarkington kindly amusement and sympathetic understanding. He writes of childhood and adolescence with a convincing sureness of touch and a humorous sympathy which brings a smile with often the suggestion of a tear behind it. To Mr. Tarkington the tragedies and joys of youth seem as real as to youth itself, perhaps because he writes of what he has himself experienced. Records tell of a youthful Booth Tarkington whose quick imagination peopled his child world with make-believe characters and captained games of "let's pretend"; *Penrod* and *Penrod and Sam* have caught and made eternal this buoyant spirit of a boy's imagination. At Princeton there is a tradition of a gay youth who threw himself whole-heartedly into every college activity and enlivened by his special gift of song many social hours; in *Seventeen* the same youth, younger and less sophisticated, plunges into every experience with the conviction that it matters mightily.

Booth Tarkington was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1869. In 1893 he was graduated from Princeton University and six years later was given the degree of Master of Arts. In 1919 in recognition of his distinguished work, Princeton cor-

ferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Literature. He is such a prolific writer and so well-known to a large public that one finds it hard to believe that he too had to serve his apprenticeship and learn his art through struggle. He tells us that during five years after graduation his income from his writing amounted only to \$22.50 and a goodly pile of rejection slips. With the publication of *A Gentleman from Indiana* he won recognition and a market for much of the work which had hitherto remained unsold. Since then novels, short stories, and plays have followed each other in quick succession. *Seventeen*, from which this story is taken, was originally published as a series of short stories which were later collected in book form. *Penrod* and *Penrod and Sam* were similarly published.

Mr. Tarkington still lives in Indianapolis, but spends a part of each year in Kennebunkport, Maine, in the house which he has aptly named "The House that Penrod Built."

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. State the slight plot of this story in a few sentences. How does the element of conflict enter into the plot? The interest lies in the fact that the story gives us a situation from real life. The experiences of Willie Baxter are those of most boys of his age, when matters of trivial importance to adults assume a tragic significance to boys. As he says, "At my age there's some things that ought to be done and some things ought not to be done." Boys sometimes object to this story on the ground that Willie's actions are exaggerated; "not true to life," they claim. At once some one in the same class is sure to answer, "They're not exaggerated at all; I know a boy exactly like that." Read more of *Seventeen*, the book from which the story is taken, and discuss this question in class.
2. One might call this story a study in attitudes: the attitude of the adolescent boy toward the people of his world; of ten-year-old Jane toward her older brother; of the mother toward her boy whom she sees springing suddenly into manhood; of the father impatient of his son's conduct and objecting to the purchase of the new suit "on the principle of the thing." Is Mr. Tarkington truthful in his interpretation of their attitudes?